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Voice

Common Questions and Answers

***Q** Occasionally, I have employees who demonstrate ongoing problems with ambition, avoidance in making tough decisions, procrastination, or not appearing interested in doing their best work. The EAP can't really help these types of employees very much, correct?*

***Q** I told employees they can no longer use sick leave for vacation time. Most are upset because the last supervisor permitted this practice. Many doubled annual vacation time as a result. Should I confront abusers of sick leave and refer them to the EAP?*

A It is natural to think that employees with the long-term patterns of behavior you describe can't change. However, this is a myth. The key is clearly identifying the deficient performance or conduct issue and working toward change, first by asking your employee to make the improvements and then using the EAP if changes aren't forthcoming. Behavior patterns or work styles that you describe can be rooted in chronic depression, and such depression can remain untreated for many years. Victims of long-term depression may have only a vague awareness or no awareness at all that they are depressed because adaptation has continued for many years. Employees that you perceive as "not going the extra mile" should not be considered as inappropriate for referral to the EAP. On the contrary, your referral to the EAP may be their first and only link to help.

A Your employees have grown accustomed to additional time off and they are naturally reluctant to give it up. As a result, your decision may cause morale problems because employees feel entitled to that additional time off. Get support from management for your plan to resolve this problem. This is important, because morale problems associated with the crisis could later be attributed to you alone. Together with management you can resolve it, but a clear and decisive stand will be needed. You should use the EAP to manage employees who test the organization's resolve to stop this practice. Some may need more support with respect to anger and coping with the reduced "benefit" they no longer enjoy. Use the EAP anytime to help employees face the loss of resources or benefits that once made their lives easier.



Helping people lead healthier lives

Q For many reasons, some supervisors are reluctant to confront employees and refer them to the EAP. What can influence supervisors and motivate them to make better use of the EAP?

Q I have an employee who periodically comes to work with bruises on her arms and sometimes her neck. I suspect domestic abuse of some sort, but I don't want to invade her privacy. How can I approach this situation, and better yet, convince her to go to the EAP?

Q My employee is very manipulative. My concern is that if I make a supervisor referral to the EAP, my employee will put the focus on me and have the EAP professional believing that I am the problem, not her. How can I ensure this does not happen?

A Initially, when an EAP is implemented, supervisors may have difficulty incorporating it in their supervision practices. That's why supervisor training in the EAP is so important. Fortunately, most supervisors learn quickly that an EAP makes the job of managing employees easier. Other supervisors who are more reluctant can be helped to see the value of the EAP by observing next-level managers incorporating the program in their own supervision practices. This modeling has a powerful influence. More powerful still is holding supervisors accountable for using the EAP to manage their employees' performance and conduct problems. For example, an organization may consider effective use of the EAP by supervisors in their annual reviews or evaluations. EAPs save money and improve productivity for an organization, which provides a rationale for this accountability.

A Your observations about the condition of your employee are a key reason for the increased attention being given nationally to domestic abuse and its effect on workplace productivity. Employers are in a unique position to help, especially when an EAP is available. You can see the bruises so it is appropriate to let her know what you have observed. Saying that you "notice the bruises," and "I'm concerned for you," is prudent and appropriate. Do not push her to disclose more personal information about the origin of the bruises, but realize that your statements may elicit such information. Encouraging her to use the EAP is the next step. If there are performance issues that result from the abuse, such as reduced productivity or excessive absences, focus on the performance problems in an empathetic and caring manner and make a supervisor referral to the EAP.

A Make arrangements with the EAP before referring your employee. Write down your specific concerns about your employee and gather documentation. Speaking with the EAP professional prior to the referral is a good idea. This pre-referral work takes very little time and it goes a long way toward ensuring that your employee will be helped. It also helps prevent manipulation in the EAP interview. It is not unusual for employees to blame their job performance problems on the supervisor, but this typically does not interfere with an EAP professional's ability to identify key issues and personal problems of a troubled employee. Sometimes supervisor behaviors do contribute to problems employees face. If these behaviors are realistic concerns, EAP professionals provide appropriate guidance or referral to other sources of organizational support without compromising the balanced relationship they maintain between management and the employee workforce.

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Q Our organization has faced many recent job cuts and morale has been adversely affected. Despite my attempts as a supervisor to boost morale, I have not seen much improvement. How can the EAP help?

Q I wrote a note to my employee that said, "See me." I didn't mean for her to feel harassed, but that is how she took it. She said she didn't like "see me." I was totally surprised. What's the problem with such a note?

Q My employee says she is being "bullied" by a coworker and is becoming depressed. I have never seen the coworker acting inappropriately. How seriously should I take her complaint? Could this just be two personalities not getting along?

A Although the morale of your workgroup has not improved, the EAP can still be a partner in helping employees recapture a sense of purpose in their jobs and confidence in the future of the organization. Some employees suffer more than others from low morale. Making a supervisor referral to the EAP when productivity, enthusiasm, confidence and loyalty to the work organization are problematic can help employees cope with underlying stress and anxiety. In some cases, the EAP may help employees clarify their career goals. The ability of the EAP to penetrate all levels of the organization makes it an unmatched consultative resource. The EAP can also provide insight to management, help the organization determine how it can gather information about morale problems and formulate interventions that match the unique culture of the organization.

A Many employees experience anxiety when asked to meet with a supervisor for an unknown reason. Being handed such a note generates anxiety because of the struggle imagining what it means or what you want. Such a note is usually interpreted negatively and viewed as a prelude to a confrontation or unpleasant news. Getting such a note (particularly on a Friday night) can cause an employee to fret an entire weekend. Many worried employees later discover that the note related only to a trivial matter. Consider providing more information to your employees if you must leave a note requesting to see you at a future date or time. Failure to do so can cause needless distraction, lost productivity and undue anxiety. Many supervisors do not realize that they have so much influence. Try not to be a "see me" supervisor to employees who report to you.

A A complaint of deliberate, hurtful mistreatment by a coworker toward another is enough to justify your investigation and intervention. You should be especially concerned about the complaint that your employee is depressed. Bullying behavior can occur at work just like on a playground, and an authority figure may be the last one to witness it. Bullying can lower morale and affect productivity, and the psychological injury can be as real as a physical injury. Bullied employees are particularly prone to absenteeism to gain relief. Take claims of bullying seriously to show employees that abusive behavior will not be tolerated. As with sexual harassment or violent acts, both the perpetrator and the victim of bullying can benefit from EAP services. Gather the facts and, after you confront the bullying employee, guard against the bully's attempts to retaliate against the victim.

***Q** I have an employee who is frequently late to work in the morning because he moonlights until late at night. I have warned him repeatedly, but it has not helped. I can't see an EAP role in this problem.*

***Q** My employee is impulsive in speech and behavior, makes crude jokes, invades the privacy of others, invites himself to lunch, and is irritating to many people. Is this an EAP issue? In my opinion, he is simply an immature man in his fifties.*

A Like many performance and attendance problems, it may at first appear that the EAP can't do much, but this is often not the case. Your employee's tardiness and failure to correct it make an EAP referral appropriate. Upon accepting an EAP referral, an EAP professional can discover issues that may lead to a solution. These may include dealing with financial problems that force him to work an extra job, making changes in his moonlighting schedule, finding a different part-time job, resolving denial associated with his tardiness and its consequences, identifying interventions to prevent tardiness, and discovering techniques for getting to work on time.

A Your employee's behavior is unacceptable and disruptive to the workplace. It is therefore appropriate to document it, insist that it stop and make an EAP referral if it does not. The behavior may be immature and impulsive, but it could also be associated with other medical or behavioral health conditions you are unable to diagnose. Hyperactive and impulsive behavior could be related to adult attention deficit disorder, drug use or other medical problems. It is natural to assume that there are simple explanations for behaviors we find irritating, but this is not always the case. The more upset we become and angrily we react to such behavior, the more we believe the person has the ability to control it. This dynamic is a common one that prevents many people from getting the health care or treatment they need.

**For assistance, contact your
EAP professional
800.765.0770**